



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies

1/46, Old Elephant Road, Dhaka 1000

ROUNDTABLE

on

BANGLADESH-INDIA RELATIONS: EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS

Saturday, 09 January 2010

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

Honoured Chief Guest, Dr, Dipu Moni, Honourable Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh,
Respected Chairman, Professor Rehman Subhan,
Excellencies, Learned Speakers, Distinguished Participants, Respected Guests, Ladies
and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Morning,

I am honoured to have the privilege of welcoming you all to the ***ROUNDTABLE*** on
BANGLADESH-INDIA RELATIONS: EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS organised by the
Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh's relations with India have traversed through a chequered process. From an apogee of very close friendship in the aftermath of Bangladesh's independence in 1971, Bangladesh-India relations plummeted into a nadir of mutual mistrust and suspicion within a very brief period. Neither the warm or lukewarm relationship sustained for a long period primarily due to the complexity of the relationship between the two countries. On the one hand, factors pertaining to history, geography, economy, politics, culture and so on suggest or, to an extent, dictate cooperation between the two countries. As a consequence, cooperation between the two countries continues to persist on a very wide

range of areas even during the turbulent times in bilateral relations. On the other hand, the same factors, as suggested, often generate almost irreconcilable conflict of interest resulting in the persistence of discords between the two countries over a wide range of issues even during the best time in bilateral relations. Thus, the interplay of these two contradictory set of factors ensure that the mutual relationship between Bangladesh and India remains characterised by the elements of conflict and co-operation at the same time. In the circumstances, it becomes difficult to identify and, more so, to gauge the magnitude, intensity, content and the significance of Bangladesh-India relationship, in its totality or in its different dimensions. The same factors also contribute to the creation and sustenance of blurred view and distorted perceptions on the part of India with regard to Bangladesh and *vice-versa*.

However, understanding all the complexities in Bangladesh-India relations is a vital necessity. In terms of the stake involved in bilateral relations, India merits greater significance for Bangladesh than any other country. Suffice it to mention that the issues at stake in Bangladesh-India relations are of crucial importance more for Bangladesh, both for its peace and prosperity. As indicated, Bangladesh-India relations embrace virtually all aspects of inter-state relations. These, while impinge on the prospects for the political and economic emancipation of Bangladesh, not much academic efforts have been employed to gauge the nature, magnitude and intensity of challenges faced by Bangladesh in managing its relations with India. Even, less has been done to explore the policy options for the country in overcoming these challenges.

Meanwhile, with the formation of the government headed by the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 6 January 2009, a new era of fresh prospects and opportunities of revamping the Bangladesh-India relations have opened before the two countries. In this regard, resolving or, at least, devising *modus vivendi* regarding a host of outstanding issues and vitalising the process of mutually beneficial cooperation on a wide range of issues of vital importance to both the countries emerged as the crucial foreign policy agenda of the new government. In this context, the forthcoming visit by the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is likely to be a significant milestone in Bangladesh-India relations.

It is in this backdrop that BISS decided to organise the Roundtable. It is aimed at exploring new vistas of mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries. It would be focused on evaluating the opportunities Bangladesh has as well as the challenges faced by the country in terms of its relations with India and exploring the country's policy options in materialising the opportunities and meeting the challenges.

Four presentations would be made in the Roundtable. These are:

- i. "Management of Bangladesh-India Border" by Ambassador (Retd.) Dr. M. Afsarul Quader, Vice President, Bangladesh Enterprise Institute;
- ii. "Bangladesh-India Relations: Sharing of the Waters of Common Rivers", by Ambassador (Retd.) Muhammad Zamir, Former Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- iii. "Bangladesh-India Economic Relations" by Mr. Yousuf Abdullah Harun, Adviser, SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industries, and Former President, FBCCI;
- iv. "Bangladesh-India Relations: Regional Connectivity", by Dr. M. Rahmatullah, Former Director, Transport UN-ESCAP, Bangkok, and Transport Policy Advisor, TSMR Planning Commission, Dhaka.

The Roundtable on **Bangladesh-India Relations: Exploring New Horizons** is being held today is part of broader BISS activities. Candid discussions on national, regional and international issues in a free and academic environment have always been our prime concern. On each occasions, we have been able to assemble a host of experts from a variety of academic disciplines and socio-political background. Our main purpose has been to let the diverse ideas come into creative interaction so that the issues could be analysed from different perspectives and finally, some policy recommendations could be made. With the similar objectives in mind, the BISS has organized today's roundtable on a subject of crucial importance to the country.

With this, Honourable Chief Guest, Excellencies, Learned Participants, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me welcome you all once again and request respected Chair to kindly commence the proceedings of the workshop. Thank you.